1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
FF52 Nupe FF52

village chieftainship is thus thought of as an office held 'by the grace of the king'. I have also mentioned that the appointment of the village chief is subject, to-day as of old, to confirmation by the *Etsu* Nupe. The chief thus becomes the official representative of the king, responsible to him for law and order and the collection of tax, but also able to rely on his sovereign's spiritual or political support. The people of the village can appeal to the *Etsu* if they are dissatisfied with their chief, and in the case of rival claims to chieftainship the king would be called upon to decide between the claimants—a role which he did not always undertake impartially; bribes offered by a chief threatened with the loss of his position or a new claimant would easily influence his decision.[1] The control of the king over his chiefs is expressed already in the ceremonial of the appointment. The chief-elect, accompanied by the head elders, would be summoned to the capital to receive his appointment and to be vested with a gown, turban, and sandals as insignia of his office, in a ceremony which closely resembles the investiture of officers of state or members of the royal nobility. The *Etsu* Nupe may also be called in to arbitrate in internal disputes, e.g. over the succession to local ranks —we remember the example from Doko. Lastly, legal cases come under the jurisdiction of the *Etsu* and his appointed agents, thus removing from the orbit of the community the right to see offences punished and retaliation achieved.

Another source of 'disturbance' lies in the impact of Islam. It led in many cases to a spiritual separation of chief and community, for many chiefs embraced Islam (at least nominally) long before the rest of the people. Thus these chiefs can no longer organize, and rarely even show interest in, the traditional religious ceremonies which weld the community into a single congregation. Nor can they base their authority, hereditary or not, on that spiritual commonness of which it was once an expression. They rely instead more or less openly on the closer association with the Mohammedan rulers of the country with whom they now share the creed—at least one feature of their exalted position. In its ever-increasing scope of proselytizing, Islam drives the wedge of another class distinction into the structure of village society. The distinction between Mohammedans and pagans in a village often has this effect, that the two sections differ not only in religious observances, but also in general mode of life, dress, important food habits (Mohammedans do not drink sorghum-beer, the traditional ceremonial drink of the Nupe peasants), their—often imaginary—educational qualification and, again, in the degree of the affinity they could claim to the highest social stratum in the country.

In other spheres of life—economic, educational—similar influences are at work, striking at the very roots of social homogeneity. But we may cut short our description; we shall meet with these influences again later. Our present discussion has established the main facts. For at least a century and a half the Nupe village did not exist in that self-centred, secure isolation in which the balance of its social system could fulfil

[1] Bribes to the *Etsu* are said to have played an important part in gaining the assent of the king when the new chiefs of Doko usurped the chieftainship.

1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
FF52 Nupe FF52

182
643
539
186

And all the people were giving thanks to *Etsu* Bello,
Because he gave his money to buy a motor-car,
That motor-car that will become a thing of benefit
To all the human beings.

182
643
773

In myth and religion the 'binding forces' of the kingdom gather themselves to fullest strength. The *Etsu* Nupe is not, as we have seen, the religious as well as the political leader of his people; unlike the village chief, he cannot even claim kinship links with the priests of his country. But Nupe kingship is linked in so many ways with religious usages and forms of ritual symbolism that they inevitably become instruments of political solidarity. Rites and beliefs are focused upon the person of the king. Appeals for the help of supernatural agencies become appeals to agencies more or less clearly symbolic of the political system. The welfare and continuity of the community, unthinkable without these supernatural safeguards, become unthinkable without the state.

Out of the weak and irregular uniformity of beliefs and rituals and out of disconnected local cults and traditions the kingdom thus creates a new religious community. One of the centres of this religious unification is that 'mythical charter' which made the dynasty of Nupe kings descendants of the mythical culture-hero, Tsoede. Relics of Tsoede, regalia, instruments of ordeal, magical emblems, which exist in every town of the Emirate, are the symbols of this ancient sacred pact. The name and tradition of Tsoede is also associated with cults which secure childbirth, fertility, and well-being, with certain rituals which prevent floods of the Niger, drive away disease, or bring punishment upon a criminal.[1] To take one example only. In Mokwa exists a certain ritual called *Tsoede* or *sara* (Hausa, lit. malicious accusation, and also snake bite; refers here to the use of the ritual as ordeal), which is practised as ordeal, or whenever trouble befalls the community. It is performed by the *Sheshi*, that 'king-maker' of whom we have heard before; he places the short 'chain of Tsoede', the insignia of his office, on the ground in the sacred grove, makes a sacrifice of beer and fowl, and speaks thus:

God, we have come.
God, everybody has come.
This ancient thing of Tsoede
Which is lying on the ground,
It says we should bring beer.
Because of the old saying which we have heard,
Because of that we bring beer and fowl.
Tsoede, make the whole town prosper [or whatever is
the special aim of the invocation].

182
643
794

A powerful secret society, organized to combat witchcraft, the order of the *ndakó gboyá*, became a *kuti 'tsu*, a King's Cult, only half a century ago. There is no doubt that the *ndakó gboyá* cult itself existed long before that. But under *Etsu* Masaba the head of this order, the grandfather of

[1] This latter cult I have described in *Man*, 1935, 143. The association of Tsoede with the main fertility cult of Nupe, the *gunnu*, is discussed in *J.R.A.I.*, 1937, p. 218.

1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
FF52 Nupe FF52

the present head of the *ndakó gboyá* society, was invested with the pompous title of *Majī Dodo*, Master of the Monster, and with this royal recognition the organization of the society was made subservient to Nupe kingship. One after the other the heads of the society received their titles from the *Etsu* Nupe. Villages and districts which sought the help of the *ndakó gboyá* against witches had to apply first to the king. This new royal prerogative also entailed a considerable economic benefit: for the king shared in the income of the order which was derived from the gifts collected in the villages which had called in the *ndakó gboyá*.[1] But besides tapping a new source of income the co-operation between *Etsu* and anti-witchcraft society meant adding to the centralized temporal jurisdiction the power of spiritual, mystic jurisdiction over the supernatural enemies of society. This powerful prerogative of the king was, in fact, maintained by the Mohammedan Fulani Emirs till very recently.[2]

Every performance of these various rituals and cults in the villages and towns of Nupe—and many are still performed every year, long after the disappearance of the Tsoede dynasty—revived and perpetuated the consciousness of this unity which has grown into far more than an external bond of political unification. With the Islamization of the country many of these factors lost their power. The Fulani rulers could use the secret organization of the *ndakó gboyá*; they could seize by force, as they actually did, the royal insignia from the last Nupe king. They could not transfer the authority of the former 'mythical charter' to their own alien rulership. But they could introduce another, younger, and perhaps more powerful uniting force, Islam—Islam as creed and Islam as education. Mosques, a *Liman* and Mallams in every village, these are the instruments of propaganda.[3] And in every religious service, in every babbling little Mallam school this propaganda is enacted. Teaching Islam means teaching the holy cause which sent the conquerors down to this country. Praying to Allah means praying to the God of the powerful and sharing with them, if not their power, their beliefs. But Mohammedanism even becomes a real means of social approach between rulers and ruled. In a country still to a large extent pagan the adoption of Mohammedanism creates something like an intermediary social stratum, placed nearer to the rulers than the rest of the population. Formerly it involved—at least in theory—certain concrete benefits: an increased measure of security, above all, immunity from slave-raids (as the Koran forbids the enslaving of Mohammedans). This rule, however, was never strictly obeyed—unless the religious qualification was supported by the

[661]

[1] The *ndakó gboyá* society soon became a means of ruthless exploitation. The king and the members of the society were extorting money from the peasants all over the country on the grounds of ridding their villages of witches. This became so intolerable that eventually the Administration of Bida Emirate had to forbid all performances of the *ndako gboyá*. (For a fuller description see *Africa*, 1935, 4.)

[2] It is interesting to note that when the independent Emirate of Patigi was created by the Government this new Nupe ruler appointed a second *Majī Dodo* for his country.

[3] Mokwa, a village of 2,000 inhabitants, possesses eight mosques, one of them built in 1934 during my stay in the village.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

5. COUNTERMEASURES

Neither the evidence which should precede the countermeasures nor these themselves are uniform or rigidly laid down; rather, there are a number of alternative procedures, employed as chance and expediency may dictate. One can, to begin with, rely on the official 'witchfinder', the *Lelu* or *Sagi*. Then there is that incontrovertible 'proof', the naming of the witch by the victim in dream or delirium, which must occur five times to be truly conclusive; but this testimony is not always applicable nor does one always wait for it. Nor yet does proof by ordeal seem indispensable, although the Nupe know two such methods. The first consists in the application of the snake-bite medicine *wasa* mentioned before, which the accused is made to drink, the belief being that a true witch would be killed by a snake. The second ordeal is administered by the masked members of the *ndakó gboyá* society, who would take the suspect woman into the bush and make her scratch the ground with her finger-nails; if after a time (left to the discretion of the inquisitors) blood comes out from under her finger-nails, this proves her to be a witch. No informant could remember a concrete case when the first ordeal was applied; while the second disappeared with the official ban on the *ndakó gboyá*.

A witch convicted by one or the other method might be warned by the village chief, perhaps also fined, and if possible ordered to repair the harm she had done; an unrepentant witch was formerly flogged and driven from the village. Several informants maintained that a witch was never killed, since this would bring the revenge of all other witches upon the community; but according to others a dangerous witch was denounced to the *Etsu* Nupe, who would hand her over to his executioners. Above all, there are various magic means whereby witches are killed or at least frightened and subdued, though several of these have disappeared in most of Nupe country and are today known from hearsay only. One such method appears to have employed the bull-roarer (called *vúgu-vúgu*;[1] another consisted in a dance called *kútúkpa* (a word denoting the clanging noise made by a galloping horse), which is said to have afflicted witches watching it with a swollen throat, so that they could not swallow or eat and must die of hunger.[2] Only

[1] I met with an amusing 'secularized' version of the bull-roarer in Katcha, where the nightwatchman of the Niger Company used it to frighten off burglars.

[2] This method, too, has in a sense been secularized. For the steps and passes of the dance and the fantastic dress worn by the dancers have been preserved in another dance, called *sorogi* (a species of tortoise), which is meant for entertainment only and is frequently performed by groups of young men touring the country after the end of the farming season.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

two deadly weapons against witches have survived. The first is private as well as casual, and consists in the anti-witchcraft *cigbe* which individuals can acquire; the second, public and ritualized, lies in the *ndakó gboyá* cult and in the activities of the society of that name. In Nupe eyes, it is the most powerful weapon of its kind, and since its inception, probably several generations ago, it seems to have overshadowed all other anti-witchcraft measures.

As we know, the cult has merged with the main ritual of Nupe, the *gunnu*, where the *ndakó gboyá* masks appear during the vigil in the bush, to frighten novices, warn the youths to obey their elders, and whip offenders.[1] If in this context the apparition of *ndakó gboyá* is suggestively called 'the policeman of the *gunnu*', the 'police' duties extend to witchcraft also; for the masks reappear later, during the public phase of the ceremonial, to frighten all women, to discourage would-be witches, and to weaken, by their very presence, the evil powers of witchcraft. If the *ndakó gboyá* is thus thought of as a deterrent and preventive, it may also assume the character of punishment proper; for the masks are expected to drag the suspects into the bush, subject them to the ordeal described before, and kill the 'proved' witch—unless she pays a heavy ransom, which loophole, as we shall see, has far-reaching consequences.

But this is only the combination of two distinct cults. It is well understood that the peculiar powers of the *gunnu* do not depend on this addition to its ceremonial, customary though it had become. And as each cult has its own specific aims, so it can, at least on occasion, be performed independently. Nor have the officiants of the *ndakó gboyá* anything to do with the officiants or the priest of the *gunnu*. Normally, in fact, the former are strangers in the village where they perform, being members of a 'secret' society represented only in a few localities and called in specially for the occasion. Furthermore, in the north and east of Nupe, where this society never established its influence, the combination of the two cults is unknown. It is true, however, that in the rest of the country popular opinion, unaware of the esoteric organization of the *ndakó gboyá*, often confuses the two.[2] It is possible that this view was encouraged by the society itself since it kept that organization in the dark. A line in the *gunnu* songs, for example, seems cleverly designed to obscure by its ambiguous meaning the relationship between the two cults. It reads—'*gunnukó u yi Gboyá*', which may mean either 'the *gunnu* priest calls the *Gboyá*'

[1] See above, p. 83.

[2] This applies especially to foreigners. Thus the Yoruba neighbours of the Nupe call the *ndakó gboyá* cult *igunnu*.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

(a correct statement of the fact that the secret society is called in by the *gunnu* priest), or 'the Great *gunnu* is the *Gboyá*'.

The full name of the cult means 'Grandfather' or 'Ancestor *Gboyá*'; the latter word is neither a personal name nor a word that has any other meaning, though it contains the recognizable root *gbo* 'to be large' (in a physical sense). The expression 'Grandfather' in this connection has no ancestral connotation but merely indicates a show of respect. The masked apparitions also command a special address or salute, namely, *nyentso sagba*, 'One who puts to flight'. The name *ndakó gboyá* is employed for the ritual performance as such, for the masks appearing in it, and for the 'spirit' the masks are thought to represent; the cult members are simply referred to as *ndakó gboyáži*, 'the *Ndakó gboyá*-ones', and their organization is called the 'society' of *ndakó gboyá*.

The masks of the *ndakó gboyá* are unlike any other masks used in the cults of Nigerian peoples. They bear no similarity to human or animal features; each mask consists of a long tube made of white cotton cloth, just wide enough for a man to stand inside, which is suspended from a wheel-shaped bamboo frame fixed to the top of a tall pole, about twelve feet in length. The man representing the spirit stands inside the cloth tube which comes down to the ground, holding the pole in his hands. He will move about with varying speed, occasionally jumping and running, and lift and lower the pole or incline it this way or that, making the cloth tube swing and sway: which motions make up the 'dance' of the *ndakó gboyá*. There are two small slits at eye-height in the cloth; but the dancer can see little through them, and depends on the help of assistants (two or four in number and known as the 'servants' or 'interpreters' of the *ndakó gboyá*), who lead him along and clear the way for him, carrying sticks to drive back the onlookers. In large ceremonials up to ten masks may be employed, though normally there will be two or three, or even one only.

It is always a strictly kept secret who is inside the mask. Even when you know every member of a local *ndakó gboyá* society (as I did) and therefore know that one of them must be the dancer in the mask, the people will refuse to answer such questions. Nor will they agree to an informal rehearsal merely to show you the technique of the thing; for to step inside the mask is already a magic or mystic action, which requires the appropriate setting and preparations. The performer must first drink and wash himself with the *cigbe* which alone gives him the 'strength' to represent the *ndakó gboyá* and, before this, must sacrifice beer and fowl over the *cigbe* shrine and the cloth masks. Nor does the profane phrase 'to represent the *ndakó gboyá*', do justice to the situation. To begin with, the 'medicine' used by the performer is the *badúfu* kind

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

which makes you 'like a witch'; once more, then, the rule holds that it needs Beelzebub to drive out Satan. Furthermore, once the performer is inside the mask he is inseparable from the thing he 'represents'; he *is* the *ndakó gboyá*, the people insist, and no longer so-and-so, whom you know and have talked to. Once during the ceremonial I offered food and drink to the 'man in the mask', suggesting that he must be in need of refreshments after his exhausting performance. My offer was ridiculed and I was told (as I had expected) that 'spirits do not eat'. Any person who has not been initiated into the *ndakó gboyá* society or has omitted the preparatory rites would be killed by the mask as soon as he entered it. The mask, of course, is just cloth, and must be cut and tailored; many masks also show patches and signs of repair. But again, once the sacrifice has been performed over them, they are no longer merely a material object, but the thing itself which they signify.

It is not easy to say what that 'thing' is. I have called the *ndakó gboyá* a spirit, partly for the sake of convenience and partly because this is the popular interpretation. But its nature is more indefinite. It is not one of the numerous *aljenúži* which people the world: it is only 'like an *aljénu*', that is, non-human, powerful in a mystical sense, normally invisible (unless embodied in the dancing mask), endowed with the same kind of voice spirits have—an inarticulate, whining falsetto, sounding 'like the wind'—and a creature of *Sokó*. Now understood like this, the *ndakó gboyá* stands apart from the whole body of Nupe belief. But to say it again, this is only the cruder, popular view. There is another, esoteric explanation, which links the *ndakó gboyá* belief more closely with the conceptual framework of Nupe religion. It is rarely offered in so many words. It was given me by the Master of the *ndakó gboyá* society when he said that the *ndakó gboyá* was not a spirit, but *asiri gbokú*—a 'strong secret', that is, a knowledge or skill of a mystical and powerful kind. We remember that the same interpretation is expressed in the two legends about the origin of the *ndakó gboyá*. They do not describe it as a 'spirit', but merely as a 'secret', as something implying 'great strength', and as the knowledge of some mysterious, supernatural way of acting. They equate the *ndakó gboyá* with that principle of a mystical force, capable of being invoked and manipulated by man, which is embodied in the Nupe concept of *kuti*; indeed, in the concluding phrases of the legends it is referred to by that name.

The legends also illustrate certain other features of the *ndakó gboyá*, such as the voice of the apparition and the salute due to it. The iron rod (*sãyi*) mentioned in the second story is one of the paraphernalia of the cult; and the description of the cult in the first story as a '*kuti* of kings' bears on the important link between the

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

754x 794 secret society and Nupe kingship. The legends, however, are silent both about the society itself and the beginnings of its organization, dealing only with the origin of the 'great secret', not with the machinery devised to exploit it. For an account of the latter we must turn to the more prosaic and rational traditions preserved in the family of the Masters of the cult. Oddly enough, in this quarter the legends are unknown; the present Master was unacquainted even with the esoteric version which, according to my informants, was taught to their forefathers when they were initiated into the society. I can only conclude that, with the growth of the purely secular (that is, political) machinery of the secret society, the men at the centre lost interest in these, to them, recondite stories. The present Master did not call them untrue; he thought that they might well be true, referring to events in other parts of the country of which he no longer had any knowledge. This was also the way he thought of the *ndakó gboyá*, as a 'secret' somehow discovered, and later put to organized use by his society: it was this 'later' phase of which he was eager to speak. I must add, finally, that in certain places on the south bank of the Niger the legends are entirely unknown. There the people hold that the *ndakó gboyá* had been among the various magic secrets which Tsoede brought to Nupe. They thus regard the anti-witchcraft cult not only as a 'cult of kings' but as bound up with the very origin of kingship.

The headship of the *ndakó gboyá* society is held in a lineage whose remembered pedigree goes back only four generations, to one Mamako Gana, a hunter of Dibo extraction.[1] He is said to have already possessed the magic of *ndakó gboyá*, to have practised it against witches, and to have taught it to others. His son, Sara Jiya, was a great traveller, and finally settled at Kusogi Danci, a small village on the river. When Masaba, the younger brother of the first Fulani Emir of Nupe, rebelled against his elder brother and founded his rival kingdom south of the Niger (1838), he met Sara Jiya and, so it is said, was greatly impressed by his magic powers. Recognizing the importance and value of the *ndakó gboyá* cult, Masaba made its master his servant and gave him the most appropriate title *Majī Dodo*, 'Master of the Terrible'. After Sara Jiya's death, when Masaba had become *Etsu* Nupe in Bida, he made one of Sara Jiya's pupils the new *Majī Dodo*, a certain Ndasaba, a Bida man and a diviner and barber-doctor by trade. After the latter's death the title reverted to Sara Jiya's sons, whom Masaba called to the capital; four of the six sons obeyed the

[1] The Dibo sub-tribe of Nupe occupies the easternmost district of the country. The descendants of Mamako Gana still wear the facial marks of the Dibo sub-tribe.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

754x 794 summons and settled in a hamlet near Bida, which they called Kusogi, in memory of their old home. When the then *Majī Dodo* died, the eldest of the four brothers succeeded to the office, receiving his title at the hands of *Etsu* Abubakari. He was in turn succeeded by his son, Yizufu, the present *Majī Dodo* (and my informant), who was appointed by *Etsu* Bello (d. 1926).[1]

The society itself appears to be only some eighty years old. It was only during Masaba's reign in Bida (1860–73) that the Masters began to accept novices and to train initiates from outside their lineage, thus transforming a kinship-bound observance into a cult society. The membership spread indirectly as well, each man initiated by the Master in turn initiating his own kinsmen and sometimes also strangers from other villages. Each of the groups so founded acts in a body on all ritual occasions, thus forming a local cell or 'lodge' of the society. I listed eight lodges north of the Niger, all founded by men initiated in Kusogi; they are widely dispersed through the country, being found, for example, in Sakpe and Shebe in the centre of Nupe Emirate, in Epa in the extreme west, and in Esā in the north; many more are strung along the south bank of the river. The founders and heads of lodges are lesser Masters, being called the *nūsaki* ('elders') of the society while the men whom they have initiated are their *bara* (dependents or servants).

Neither the headship of lodges nor ordinary membership are simply hereditary; the sons or younger brothers of deceased members (the usual heirs) must be specially initiated by the head of the lodge, while his prospective successors must be formally accepted by the Master. Ordinary members, whose initiation was second-hand, are not permitted to make further proselytes. Nor could they do so since the indispensable cult paraphernalia are in the possession only of the Elders, who received them at their own initiation. The distinction between the two grades is somewhat blurred by the factor of kinship; for the sons or brothers of the Elder, who share his house (which contains the paraphernalia) and will one day succeed him, are by these facts placed on a slightly different footing from ordinary initiates, who cannot claim such privileged intimacy. For the Master of the society, however, this

[1] There is a separate branch, under its own Master, at the original Kusogi. It was called into being by the first *Etsu* of Patigi, the small Emirate on the south bank of the Niger which the British Government granted to the dispossessed original Nupe dynasty. The *Etsu* felt that he needed a *Majī Dodo* of his own and appointed one of the two sons of Sara Jiya who had stayed behind when their brothers emigrated to Bida. The male line becoming extinct, the office later went to a sister's son, who had, however, to be initiated by the Bida Master. The latter is, in all other respects as well, regarded as the superior and true head of the cult.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

X 754
794

distinction does not exist; for him, every member of the cult alike is his 'child' or his 'father's child'.

The procedure of initiation was described to me as follows. The candidate presents himself to the Master or Elder, bringing with him a gift of beer and fowls, intended for the sacrifice which will conclude his initiation. He stays for ten days, having 'lessons' every day. He is taught the procedure of the ceremonial, the ways of manipulating the mask, the special dance steps and drum rhythms, and the legend of the *ndakó gboyá*.[1] He also learns a number of ritual rules: that he must not eat snakes, lest his children will 'never walk'; that he must refrain from sexual intercourse for a week before performing the *ndakó gboyá*; and how to use the medicine which is to give him 'strength' for the performance. If the novice is to become an Elder or the founder of a new lodge, he will also be taught the manner of sacrificing beer and fowl over the cult objects and the prayer formula—'Iron rod, do not permit anyone to do evil things. Tsoede, may he give us children. The children we have, and our wives, God may give them health.' The novice is repeatedly examined, and beaten with a twig if he makes mistakes. Should he prove incapable of learning his 'lessons' after ten days, he would be dismissed as a hopeless case. Normally, the period of tuition proper will now be at an end, and the final sacrifice will be performed jointly by master and pupil. For three years afterwards the novice will frequently visit his master, now merely to 'salute' him, bringing a gift of five kolanuts each time. During this period the novice will join in every performance of the *ndakó gboyá* arranged by his master, being lent a mask for the occasion. When the three years are over, the novice becomes a fully fledged member of the society; upon a final payment he receives a mask of his own, and will henceforth be able to perform the *ndakó gboyá* independently, though he would still need the help of his master, who alone owns the required *cigbe*. Only if the novice becomes the founder of a new lodge, will he receive the 'medicine' itself, in its usual decorated earthen vessel, together with two other cult objects, a number of iron rods with small bells on the top (called *sãyi*) and a small iron chain, described as a piece of the 'Chain of Tsoede'. We note this use of the royal emblem; it fittingly appears in a cult protected by royalty, including an invocation of the ancestor king in its ritual, and called a '*kuti* of kings' in the legends describing its origin. Initiation into the society is expensive, especially for the prospective founders of lodges. The grandfather of one of my informants, for example, paid the equivalent of £20 (or twice the customary

[1] In the branches of the society unfamiliar with the legend, this is replaced (quite consistently) by the story of Tsoede (see above, p. 192).

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

brideprice). Since few can afford the high fee, the membership, at least in the higher grade, is perforce restricted.

As will have been seen, the organization of the *ndakó gboyá* society shares certain features with that other 'closed society', the order of the *cigbeciži*. I knew of no case, incidentally, in which the same individual belonged to both. But there are certain relevant differences. The *ndakó gboyá* society rests upon a network of lodges and centres of ritual collaboration, not upon a number of scattered individuals; it is much more highly centralized as well as closely knit; and its growth is restricted not only by the high initiation fees but also by the rule, unknown among the medicine-men, that not every member can recruit new ones. It is interesting that no new initiations have taken place in the lifetime of the present generation. My informants could offer no explanation for this. The spread of Islam is certainly not responsible: the various Masters received their rank from Moslem Emirs, and the present incumbents, at least, consider themselves good Mohammedans.[1] Also, the increasing wealth of the country should have made entry into the *ndakó gboyá* easier, not more difficult. I suspect that the Masters of the society, or perhaps their royal protectors, stopped further recruitment precisely in order to prevent the society from growing too large and unwieldy; for as we shall see, its very power, its efficiency under centralized control no less than its financial success, would seem to depend on the smallness of the group which shares in the secret activities.

These activities fall into three groups. The first, of more personal character, concerns only the heads of lodges and follows the familiar pattern of ritual observances entailed in the 'ownership' of 'Great *cigbe*' or of a *kuti* priestship. Thus the head of the lodge will perform all his ancestral sacrifices over the *cigbe* vessel and the other cult objects, which are always kept together in a special hut. He performs a similar sacrifice also as a fixed annual rite (in the 7th or 12th month), now on behalf of the local community, to ensure its well-being and the fertility of the womenfolk. On such occasions one mask will also appear and dance in the village, which performance has no bearing on witchcraft or the punishment of witches. The funerary rites for the Elder of the lodge again include this sacrifice and masked dance.

The second group of activities consists in the performance of the masked dance upon request, that is, when the society is called in by some village in the area, either because it is celebrating the annual *gunnu* or because it feels itself threatened by witches. It is on such occasions that the masks will cleanse the village of witchcraft by 'frightening' the women or bringing an individual witch

[1] The tiny hamlet of Kusogi, for example, includes a small mosque.

754x 794 [368]

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

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794

to justice. Let me here say a few words about the secrecy of the proceedings. I have called the *ndakó gboyá* organization a 'secret society'. It is clear, however, that the existence of the society is no secret; everyone knows about it, and everyone has at one time or other seen it in action. Nor is there any mystery about the localities which harbour the lodges. But certain weighty secrets remain: the rules and observances of the *ndakó gboyá*; the training of the adepts; the very source of their power; and, above all, the identity of the masked actors. When a village chief or *gunnu* priest summons the members of a lodge he addresses himself only to the head, and does not know whom the latter will choose for the masked dance; the rest of the people may not even know the master of the lodge, and would certainly not know his helpers or 'servants'. This mystery becomes both deeper and more formidable when the masks appear uninvited and unannounced: this is the final group of activities of the cult members, which makes them a 'secret society' in the full sense of the word.

For it seems that the members of a lodge also made a habit of touring all the neighbouring districts, unexpectedly appearing in the various villages, on the pretext that these had to be 'cleansed of witchcraft'. They would scare the women and threaten 'witches', demanding a heavy ransom before they let them go, and a heavier ransom still (up to £100) before they would leave the village. Often, the villagers had to appeal to the *Etsu*, so that he might finally order the *Majī Dodo* to recall his 'children'. No one doubted that both the Master of the society and its royal protector connived in these extortions; equally, they shared in the proceeds, two-thirds of which went to the society and its Master, and one-third to the *Etsu*. Sometimes, too, the *Majī Dodo* would take the initiative, requesting the *Etsu's* authority (never refused) to send his agents to a 'witchcraft infested' district. Or the *Etsu* himself might mobilize this *kuti* of kings, ordering a 'great' *ndakó gboyá*, staged by all the lodges of the country together, with very similar results. Traditionally, it is claimed, these performances by royal request never took place in Bida; nor was there any pretext for it since the *Lelu* or *Sagi* of the city amply protected its people from the threats of witchcraft. Whether this rule was meant to uphold the 'king's peace' in the capital or to protect its wealthy citizens from the greed of the secret society, we cannot decide. However this may be, the rule certainly no longer applied under *Etsu* Bello, under whom the abuses of the *ndakó gboyá* remained altogether unchecked.

My information on this point is supported, not only by official reports, but also by the testimony of the present *Majī Dodo*, who held office then and frankly admitted the whole story, naïvely

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

adding that 'the *ndakó gboyá* people were doing beautifully'. When, in the peace celebrations of 1918, the Nigerian Government encouraged the people throughout the territory to perform their tribal ceremonials and festivities, *Etsu* Bello ordered a 'great' *ndakó gboyá*, with twenty masks, to be staged in Bida. Afterwards, the cult society went 'on tour' through the districts, in the customary way. According to the *Majī Dodo*, every village asked for a visit, a great fear of witchcraft suddenly sweeping the country. Invited or not, the *ndakó gboyá* people continued their tour for a whole year, sucking the country dry and collecting vast sums. A final performance, again ordered by *Etsu* Bello, took place in Bida in 1921; it lasted for a whole day and ended once more in a prolonged and profitable 'tour' of the country. This time the effects were even more disastrous; complaints began to reach the Administration, many villages were unable to pay their tax, while some even emigrated to other parts. At last Government stepped in and banned all further performances.

The proscription of the *ndakó gboyá* only applies to Bida Emirate, not to the Nupe districts south of the Niger which lie in a different Province. There the *ndakó gboyá* society is still active, though it seems to have reformed its character, and a memorable performance, vividly remembered, took place in Ilorin in the Jubilee year 1935. It is remembered especially because it demonstrated the power of the *ndakó gboyá*; a Yoruba man who scoffed at the masks and refused to take off his cap (as all onlookers must do) is said to have at once been 'struck down' and killed. Nor is the prohibition taken literally in the smaller, out-of-the-way villages, where the masked dance is still performed, if without its witch-hunting aspects. Let me here insert the description of such a performance.

6. A NDAKÓ GBOYÁ CEREMONIAL

I saw it in October 1934 (the 7th month in Nupe counting) at Kutigi, where it was staged by men from Shebe, a *ndakó gboyá* lodge a few miles away. The performance represented the annual ceremonial of the Shebe lodge, repeated in Kutigi (where I had been staying) in my honour: or so it was claimed.[1] I need not describe the preparatory sacrifice and the other ritual preparations which took place in Shebe, in the house of the Elder. The public

[1] I later found that this was not quite correct. My presence in Kutigi was regarded merely as a convenient pretext (and protection) for the resumption of the customary 'tours' of the *ndakó gboyá* people. Apart from a perfunctory 'salute' at the beginning of the ceremonial, neither the dancers nor the public took much notice of me, which I for one was glad to observe.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

794 performance began at dawn, when one of the masks suddenly appeared in the streets of Kutigi, making its presence known by its shrill falsetto scream. There were only two masks in this performance; but they were never seen together, one disappearing in the bush before the other appeared from some unexpected quarter, so that this impression of a Nupe onlooker was not so far off the mark—'the masks are numberless: they spring from the ground and are swallowed by the ground'. Later in the morning, people began to appear in the streets and two drummers took their position on the market place. Soon the market place was crowded with men, women, and children. The drummers were drumming and singing, and the mask began to dance, now and again rushing at the crowd, which would disperse with shrieks of fear and sometimes with laughter; but the laughter was forced and nervous, and certainly did not stop the people from running away. The younger women, especially, would escape to the nearest house, to hide in the doorway. The masked dancer always appeared accompanied by two 'servants', who were guiding his steps, made room for him with the help of big sticks they carried, and also acted as his 'interpreters' when, later on, the chief and other notables joined the crowd; the 'servants' would 'translate' the respectful salutes of the newcomers to the 'spirit', and the latter's shrieks and weird noises to the audience. These spirit messages were always the same and pretty nondescript; they assured the people that God would give health to the community and children to the women, and would keep evil from the village.

An hour or two later the gathering assumed a more definite shape, having until then moved this way and that in an irregular and amorphous fashion. Also, more firmly arranged in distinct groups and made to take an active part, the crowd was losing its earlier nervousness and fear. Old men were playing the part of organizers and ushers, forming the onlookers into a large circle, men on one side, women and children on the other, the mask and the drummers in the centre. The younger women were clapping hands, hesitatingly at first, an old woman here and there indicating the rhythm with her hands high in the air. Finally, both men and women started to sing. A number of old women from Shebe formed a prominent group, leading in the singing and shaking gourd rattles in rhythm. Suddenly an old woman, the *Sagi* of Kutigi, stepped into the middle of the circle, and began to dance opposite the mask. She was followed by two of the Shebe women, who were shaking their rattles, singing as though addressing the mask, and occasionally breaking into a long-drawn, high-pitched shriek. The mask continued to dance inside the circle, with varying speed, now calmly, now excitedly. From time to time

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

the servants, as though listening to the mask and translating its wishes, would order the drummers to change the rhythm; or the mask, silent until then, would stop and talk some gibberish in a falsetto voice, which meant another 'message' or salute, duly translated by the interpreters. Or finally, the mask would set out on a sudden excursion, breaking through the circle, run down a side-street and temporarily disappear.

The mood of the gathering grew more and more excited until, about noon, just when it seemed that the excitement would reach fever pitch, there was a sudden hush. The drumming paused, as did the dancing and singing. The mask stood still, flanked by the 'servants', and a number of old women walked up to it and, on their knees, with bent head, saluted the mask. They handed small gifts of money to the 'servants', which were meant to buy the 'protection of the *ndakó gboyá*'. (This, I was told, was only a token payment: formerly heavy sums were paid in the same fashion.) Soon afterwards the mask disappeared, now without returning, and the pause turned into a midday break, when everyone went home. At about 3 o'clock the mask reappeared on the market place, which soon filled with people, and the proceedings of the morning were resumed. The drumming and dancing went on into the night, to the light of torches and hurricane lamps, uninterrupted even by a gathering thunderstorm. At about 9 o'clock the mask danced out of the circle and disappeared in the dark, not to return. 'You see', a bystander pointed out, 'how it is swallowed up by the ground'.

The crowd of onlookers included not only every soul in Kutigi, among them all the local notables and the Fulani District Head (a 'royal prince' from Bida), the contingent from Shebe, but also many strangers who had learned of the forthcoming performance. The attitude of the crowd was an odd mixture of enjoyment and fear. Of the former there could be no doubt; for a long time afterwards people were talking about the 'nice' and 'beautiful' performance as though they were commenting on an ordinary festivity, and the 'servants' of the mask several times pressed me to say whether the '*ndakó gboyá* had pleased me'. But there was no question either of the fear. It was clearly voiced already in the women's songs; for unlike many ceremonial songs of Nupe, those sung at the *ndakó gboyá* are far from nondescript or ambiguous.

(1)

One does not call him friend
When he comes to stay in the bush:
A friend (he) is when he leaves.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

(2)

794 We are saying—'A stranger has come (in the night)'
539 He is greater than the chief.
781 We are saying—'being greater than the chief,
May he go away when day comes.'

(3)

We are desiring the cloth (mask)
Which covers the Great One.
God is in front,
He is in the back (i.e. being everywhere and all-powerful, God will protect us).

794 781 The attitude towards the *ndakó gboyá* could not be better expressed: he is a 'friend' only when he leaves, a powerful 'stranger' whom one wishes to see gone; and while one must invoke the secret of the 'cloth', it is yet so terrifying that the thought of God alone gives comfort. But let me stress that this is not merely the unthinking expression of conventional sentiments; the fear and awe referred to in the songs were clearly visible even in this ceremonial, devoid though it was of the more sinister implications of witch-hunting and punishment. When the old women presented their gifts of a few pennies to the mask, they were acting genuinely and in all humbleness; and any person whom the mask approached, man or woman, was as genuinely terrified. Men whom I knew to be sophisticated and 'enlightened', such as the local dispenser and one of my servants, ran and hid behind a hedge when the mask suddenly towered over them.

794 Nor can there be any doubt but that the people believe in the magic effects of the ceremonial. Even after the mild version I happened to see I heard the remark that the village was now clear of witchcraft. This attitude does not really conflict with the well-known extortions practised by the *ndakó gboyá* society; the admission of the abuses is one thing, and the belief in the anti-witchcraft cult quite another. Thus the Government's ban of the *ndakó gboyá* was thought regrettable if indeed not disastrous; everywhere the people spoke with envy of their cousins in Patigi who had kept their *ndakó gboyá* and hence preserved 'the only sure protection against witchcraft'. Often have I been told that in the rest of Nupe there was now no means of fighting witches, and no protection 'save God', who, as we know, is inscrutable, idle, 'far away'.

To be sure, even the *ndakó gboyá* is not a full protection. Though it may frighten witches and temporarily 'cleanse' a community, it cannot exterminate witchcraft. For not only must the cere-

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

monial be repeated, at least year by year, but each performance does no more than restrain the evil machination of witches. When I asked if the *ndakó gboyá* society, given its former power, could suppress witchcraft altogether, the answer was invariably the same: *'u jī táimako'*, 'it would help'. As in the belief in the *Lẹlu*, the Nupe expect their anti-witchcraft magic only to keep down witchcraft, 'so that it would not be too bad'. If the Nupe knew our saying about poverty they would no doubt say that witchcraft, like the poor, will always be with us; all man can hope to do is to keep it within reasonable bounds.

7. ON THE MEANING OF WITCHCRAFT

The discussion has led us back to a question previously raised—Why should there be this stubborn belief in witchcraft? I am not now referring to the ascription of witchcraft to women or to particular individuals and personalities, but to the notion of witchcraft as such which underlies these specific ascriptions, that is, to the basic premiss that some mystic power of evil is simply given and ultimately ineradicable. As regards the specific ascription of witchcraft in Nupe thought, we explained it as a projection or displacement of hatreds and aggressive desires from the sphere of rational social life into one mystically sanctioned. We may now add that, through such projection and displacement, the doctrine of witchcraft both permits anxieties to become articulate (if in fantasy language) and shows them an outlet, or scapegoat. Other scholars have viewed witchcraft beliefs in much the same light.[1] And they would agree also with this calculation of the 'gain and cost of witchcraft' (to quote Kluckhohn's suggestive phrase). The individual gains inasmuch as he is shown a legitimate outlet for his frustrations and tensions, legitimate since the society has licensed the aggressive talk and action through which the frustration and tension are relieved or 'ab-reacted' (as psychiatrists would say). And society gains inasmuch as the 'ab-reaction' is not random but canalized; indeed, society utilizes the very mode of ab-reaction in turning it into an attack upon behaviour and character traits held undesirable.

None of these explanations, however, touches upon that premiss of 'witchcraft as such'. The former concern, essentially, the social canalization of anxieties, frustrations, tensions, hatreds, into variants of the belief in witchcraft. And these will depend on the make-up of the given society or culture: while in Nupe certain features of the social structure seem to be the determinants, in

[1] See C. Kluckhohn and D. Leighton, *The Navaho*, 1946, pp. 172–81.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52
Hausa MS12
Gbari FF23

it has a number of officials of varying rank) and is constantly enlarged through the inclusion of 'cured' patients and of those 'normal' individuals who have been successful in soliciting the 'spirit possession'.

There is no secrecy about the cult and its dance performances; they are staged at frequent intervals, both in private houses and in public, and are always watched by interested Nupe crowds. But no Nupe will join in the dances or has ever entered the society. Note that the cult thus rejected revolves upon a 'treatment' of mental derangements, of diseases, that is, for which Nupe therapeutic art admits to have no reliable remedy. Yet, though always ready to experiment with new cures, neither the Nupe public nor the medicine experts have been persuaded by the *bori*. Admittedly, the *bori* is not simply another cure or remedy: it involves the wholly strange experience of auto-suggestion and hysterical abandonment or ecstasis. It equally involves, on the intellectual plane, the acceptance of new premisses (the detailed spirit universe). But as we shall see from our next example, a somewhat similar intellectual readjustment did in fact occur in the case of another alien cult and 'cure'.

(ii) *The Sogba Cult*

This cult occurs among a section of the Gwari who call themselves Gwari-Basa and live near Wushishi, to the north of Nupe, and also in a number of villages belonging to the conquered, Nupeized parts of Gwari country. Its name, *sogba*, means 'lightning', both in Gwari and Nupe. The cult is widely known also in other parts of Nupe country, and is everywhere regarded as alien, in spite of certain obvious 'Nupeisms'.[1] The name for the hereditary priest, for example, is *Žigí*, while the Gwari priests bear different names, and the whole cult is called a *kuti*, which is once more not Gwari nomenclature. In its more elaborate form the *sogba* cult culminates in an annual communal ceremony, fixed for the 2nd or 7th month, at which the men sacrifice a dog in great secrecy and the women sing and dance, carrying iron rods with bells closely resembling the *sãyi* of the *ndakó gboyá*.[2] The cult further includes a small-scale ritual of the movable type, performed by the priest at the request of clients, both fellow villagers and strangers.

These *ad hoc* ministrations are invoked for one of two reasons,

[1] It is not certain that the cult is in fact of Gwari origin; according to some informants it came originally from Yagba (a southern section of the Yoruba), and has been brought to Gwari and Nupe by immigrants from that country.

[2] This annual ritual was absent in the place I visited, Wushishi, its sketchy description being derived from verbal information only. The account that follows, however, is based on direct observation.

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either to procure the fertility of childless women or to bring about the punishment of offenders, especially of thieves, whose identity is unknown. In either event a small payment in kolanuts and money is made to the priest. The ritual involves the use of a special cult object unknown in the rest of Nupe; it consists of a forked wooden post, cut from a certain tree in such a manner that it resembles a 'tree cut in two by lightning' and planted in the ground in the priest's house, either inside a hut or in the open. Around the foot of the post there are a number of flat, black, polished stones which are described as 'thunderbolts' (*sogba* or *sokógba*). Nothing is known about the origin of the stones save that some had been collected by the grandfather of the present priest and others inherited from more distant ancestors. The priest also owns a few of the bell-rods mentioned before and a *cigbe* shrine containing a nameless 'medicine'.

The client is made to sit in a hut away from the scene of the actual rite, which is executed by the priest and two assistants (his sons or brothers). The priest crouches in front of the forked post, his assistants standing on his right and left, each gripping one of the branches of the fork. The priest pours a little beer on the 'thunderbolts' and on the ground, and briefly and informally invokes the *kuti*, explaining the nature of the request. The operative phrase is—'*Sogba*, may the woman bear a child', or—'*Sogba*, may the evil person (for example, the thief) be killed'. If the aim of the rite is to procure childbirth, the priest afterwards goes to the woman, touches her with one of the bell-rods and gives her a little of the *cigbe*, which she must drink daily for four days. The barren woman will then hope to bear a child; and the person who had suffered injury at the hands of an unknown culprit will be assured that the latter will be killed by lightning—not at once or within a definite period, but surely some time in the future. The latter notion bears on a final duty of the *sogba* priest, which is to bury all persons killed by lightning and to perform the appropriate rites for these victims of divine punishment.

The children born after the intercession of the *kuti sogba* are tied to the cult for life. Immediately after the birth of the child the *Žigí* must be informed, so that he may in turn 'inform the *kuti*' by means of another sacrifice. Afterwards the *Žigí* presents the infant with a special charm in the form of a tiny dagger, which the child (and later the grown person) must always wear around the neck. Invariably, the child is given the name *Sogba*, and is generally referred to as *egí sogba*, 'child of *Sogba*'. If such a child falls ill, his parents will seek help, not from some other *kuti* or from professional medicine-men, but again from the *Žigí*, who does not charge for this further assistance: the child thus remains

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52
Gbari FF23

the responsibility of the *sogba* cult. Also, when such children grow up and marry they will as a matter of course invoke the *sogba* sacrifice, so that their union might be similarly blessed. The same idea, of the special protection enjoyed by *sogba* children, is expressed in this at first glance incongruous fashion: *sogba* children, even as adults, may help themselves with impunity to food and things of small value from any trader on the market. If we call this practice a 'licensed theft', we can see an oblique logical connection between this impunity and that other function of the cult, the punishment of thieves.

So much for the observances in the Gwari (or Nupe-Gwari) communities. The Nupe attitude towards the cult as such and towards the annual ceremonial is one of mild curiosity or indifference: they are, for the Nupe, merely the peculiar customs of 'foreigners'. Nor has the use of the *sogba* ritual for the purpose of inflicting supernatural punishment spread to the rest of the country. This may seem puzzling; for though the Nupe have their own ordeals to bring to justice criminals who deny their guilt, this method can only be applied when suspicion has already fastened upon a person; and though the Nupe possess their deadly *cigbe* against burglars and evil-wishers, these act merely as means of protection which must be acquired beforehand. As for the magic punishment of unknown offenders after the event, the supernatural armoury of Nupe appears to lack such means. Even so, this aspect of the *sogba* cult has not been utilized. I can suggest only this reason: such punishments after the event, placed within the power of the wronged person, come very close to personal vengeance; which is utterly foreign to the legal conceptions of the Nupe. As their elaborate judicial machinery precludes all secular self-help, so it would seem to preclude also this option of supernatural vengeance.

At the same time the Nupe in the neighbourhood of villages possessing the *sogba* cult claim that they now call in the *sogba* priest to bury persons killed by lightning. Since this obviously happens only rarely, the practice can have no great weight in the religious life of the people; nor can I be certain that it is followed regularly. Yet several Nupe sections, and not only those which have adopted this special burial custom, also share, if more vaguely, the Gwari belief that death by lightning may be a punishment for theft.[1] The Nupe who adopted the burial custom, then, have seized upon a religious practice which seemed to fit conveniently their own mystic ideas or fears.

The most thorough adoption concerns the use of the *sogba* ritual as a remedy for barrenness. Numerous Nupe women, from

[1] See above, p. 33.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52
Hausa MSS

[p. 214 (iv)]

24. The appearance of the *ndakó gboyá*

25. *Bori* dance of the Hausa

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2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

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28. Mask of the 'Great *elo*'

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177

29. Dancer at the Bida *salla* with headdress modelled on the *elo* mask

[p. 230 (A)]

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

VIII

ISLAM IN NUPE

1. THE CONVERSION TO ISLAM

If the pagan religions surrounding Nupe lack the features essential to complete conversion, Islam has them all. It is a proselytizing and super-national creed; it is embodied in a church; it provides for the requisite tuition and for special procedures of admission; also, the conversion to the new, non-tribal, religion went together with a significant restructuring of the society so converted.

The historical background of the Islamization of Nupe is fairly clear. According to Nupe tradition, the fifteenth king after the mythical Tsoede, Jibiri, who reigned about 1770, was the first to adopt Islam. But the names of even earlier rulers seem to indicate Mohammedan influence (Abdu Waliyi, 1679–1700, Ibrahim, 1713–17, Abubakari Kolo, 1742–6). Towards the end of the eighteenth century, under Etsu Ma'azū, the impact of Islam had gained both in strength and purpose. It was then that Mallam Dendo came to Nupe as an emissary of the Fulani Emir of Gwando, entrusted with the double task of spreading Islam and of paving the way for the Fulani conquest, which was itself a phase in the Holy War that had been raised in the north of Nigeria. Even before Mallam Dendo's arrival, apparently, it had become customary to include mallams among the court officials of the Nupe kings, as diviners, chaplains, and advisers on matters spiritual and secular. Dendo filled this role with great efficiency, so great that he soon became the actual ruler of the kingdom. Aided by other mallams and agents of the new regime, and by a mercenary army officered by Mohammedans, he effected the overthrow of the old dynasty and turned Nupe kingdom into a vassal state of the Fulani Empire whose supreme head, the Emir of Sokoto, styled himself *Sarkin Muslmi*—'King of the Moslems'. From then onwards, Islam became the official religion, not only of royalty, but of the state, spreading through all the channels of bureaucracy, to the craft guilds and merchants, and along the main trade routes of the country. Though its firmest hold is still upon the capital it has

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

reached also the peasantry in the districts and some of the riverain population.

From the beginning, then, Islamization in Nupe was bound up with political interests and represented a change 'from above'. During the long-drawn internal wars which accompanied the Fulani rise to power acceptance of Islam meant identifying oneself with the new regime. Even today Islam stands for some such identification, with the powers that be, with the social élite, and implicitly with the culture that grew up in the capital where that power is centred and the élite resides. Islam thus added to the unification of the conquest-state, extending the area of a common culture over a population otherwise unified only by political means. More precisely, it transformed a mere holding-together, ultimately by coercion, into a belonging-together—the conscious belonging-together that goes with a shared creed.

This twin machinery of unification, political and religious, was not an entirely new thing. When the Fulani established their rule over Nupe they did so over a society itself held together essentially by political means. For though the older Nupe kingdom had grown from within the Nupe tribe and largely coincided with it, it did not rest on 'tribal' solidarity or unity alone. Rather, the political unity of the kingdom was superimposed upon heterogeneous tribal sections, autonomous communities, and a population bound to widely diverse religious practices. So that on this level already the state had to create its own religious supports. The emblems of the ancestor king Tsoede and the myths and rituals associated with his person stand in this sense for the kingdom and its overriding unity; much as the 'state church' of Islam stands for Fulani rule. But there are these differences. Islam, of course, is a religion in its own right, and one open to any country or regime; while the religious observances surrounding Nupe kingship derived their sacred import only from this association and have no meaning outside the political or national setting. The 'royal cults' and myths, therefore, specifically buttressed sovereignty and tied the population to the institution of kingship; Islam does so only incidentally and indirectly, through being the faith of sovereign and ruling class. Finally, the royal cults were merely added to the series of rituals peculiar to the various communities and tribal sections; their diverse religious life was left intact, being only made to include some observance expressive of the new 'belonging-together'. Islam supersedes all the diverse beliefs and practices; it makes proselytes, not scattered cult members, and involves complete identification, not merely the acceptance of tokens of identity.

These contrasts reflect both the different potentialities of Islam

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

and of the pagan cults, and the different conditions in which the religious unification occurred, here following upon an alien domination, and there buttressing an indigenous kingdom still 'tribal' in many respects. It is difficult to draw any general conclusion from this fortuitous combination of two sets of factors. It may seem suggestive that the alien conquest and the indigenous state employed religion in radically different ways. But then, the particular employment of religion in support of the alien conquest also accorded with the potentialities of the religion professed by the conquerors. In other words, the alien ruling group happened to carry with it a creed which, being proselytizing and non-tribal, seems to have offered precisely the support their regime demanded; and this being so, it is futile to speculate on the kind of situation that would have arisen had the conquerors not professed such a suitable creed. Indeed, without the impetus of Islam the whole conquest would probably not have taken place or taken that particular form. We may point out two things, however.

The Islamization of the country is far from complete, both in that it reached only a portion of the population and in that it often remained superficial. Thus Islam, far from superseding the indigenous ceremonials, often merely furnished new, additional ones. The new ceremonials stand for a common cult, no more; and this in turn stands for a new unity, of the Mohammedan regime and the conquest-state: but it stands for it only as another 'token of identity'. So that the regime based on conquest is still employing the same religious support which characterized the indigenous kingdom. If this means that the potentialities of Islam have not (or not yet) been fully utilized, in other respects they required correction. For Islam points beyond the state which may adopt it for its church; for the Nupe, it means conversion to a creed uniting a vast population in Nigeria and West Africa (though few Nupe would think of Islam as a world religion). Also, as we have said, this creed of a ruling class lacks the explicit reference to sovereignty which the pagan 'royal cults' possessed. Thus, to serve as a buttress of State and Throne', the broad conception of Islam needed some narrowing down and its practice some remodelling. As we shall see this has indeed been achieved.

Let me first say a few words about the motives which induced individuals and whole communities in Nupe to embrace the new faith. The Fulani did not resort to mass conversions imposed by force. But the prestige value implicit in this creed of a ruling class was certainly one of its inducements. It offered, besides, two more specific material advantages. First, conversion to Islam promised safety from slavery; secondly, the patronage of nobility, which peasants and craftsmen would seek for economic reasons as well

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

as to secure legal protection, involved accepting the religion of the rulers.[1] The rough and ready conversions which were the result cannot have involved any elaborate rules of spiritual preparation. Indeed, during the early Fulani regime, there were no such rules, though there was a set procedure. A man declaring to his chosen patron, not to any member of the clergy, that he wished to become a Mohammedan, and the gift, in return, of a turban and sword, sealed at once the conversion and the grant of patronage. Today, the procedure is, at least in theory, a little more elaborate and less worldly. The would-be convert is supposed to turn to a mallam for the necessary tuition, which is brief and superficial, consisting only in memorizing a few *surât* of the Qoran. In due course, he will make the declaration of faith (that is, speak the first *surah*) during the service in the mosque, after which he can don a turban, the visible sign of the accomplished conversion. A few older men I met had in fact undergone this procedure. But nowadays most adults as it were slip into Islam; they simply decide to attend the mosque (however irregularly), to perform the prescribed observances (however perfunctorily), and to exchange the indigenous phrygian caps for turbans. They may, however, seek tuition afterwards, many mallams having such 'self-made' Mohammedans among their pupils. The younger people professing Islam have mostly grown up in that faith; many received tuition in a Qoran school in their youth; others merely had parents who, in spite of their own pagan beliefs, arranged for their children a birth and naming ceremony in Mohammedan style.

The observances followed by the Nupe Mohammedans are as simple and liberal as is the procedure of conversion. The five basic duties of Islam—bearing witness to the One God; reciting the five daily prayers (*salât*); giving alms; observing the Fast (Ramadhan); and making the pilgrimage to Mecca—are, for most Nupe, reduced to two. When you ask a Nupe what makes a Mohammedan, the answer is invariably this—*ji salla* (i.e., saying the daily prayers) and keeping the Fast. The declaration of faith in One God has slipped into the background of things taken for granted. This is not unnatural; since the traditional belief of the Nupe knows one deity only, as abstract and remote as the God of Islam, the testimony to His uniqueness strikes no one as a point of great importance. Nor are the Nupe greatly exercised over the finer theological distinctions between *Sokó* and *Allah*; mostly they regard them as two names for the same being. The giving of alms (*sádaka*) is, as we know, embodied in numerous institutional occasions; but it is regarded merely as a desirable thing, not as an obligation in its own right, deserving to be listed among the

[1] See *A Black Byzantium*, pp. 142–3.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

'foundations' of the faith. The pilgrimage to Mecca does not even fall under the heading of desirables; at least, it is desirable only in a very abstract and remote sense, the whole notion being, for most Nupe, utterly unreal and impracticable.[1]

The duties just discussed are only as it were minimum obligations, referring to the explicit practical tasks incumbent upon Moslems. In addition, there is the whole body of learning, theological and more general, that goes with this creed the very first steps of which concern scholarship, reading, writing, and knowledge of the 'book'. Furthermore, Islam is a way of life—*sunna*—no less than a doctrine; as such, it bears on kinship rules, the position of women, ethics, and law; on art and forms of recreation; and on the attitude towards other creeds.

2. DAILY WORSHIP

Yet even the basic, 'minimum', duties represent a mode of worship, and hence a 'way of life', utterly novel to people reared in traditional Nupe culture. The prayers in an alien tongue, which must be memorized and repeated in word-perfect fashion, have nothing in common with the variable and informal addresses of the deity typical of the Nupe ceremonials. This is true equally of the whole notion of daily prayers, that is, of a routine of worship pervading workaday life and not restricted to rare festive occasions or times of need and anxiety. The worship inside buildings is similarly unprecedented; and so is the idea of individual worship in the place of group ceremonial. Even the gatherings at the mosque on Fridays or festive days represent only the massed worship of so-and-so many separate individuals, not a collective act, resting on collaboration and a division of tasks, such as the Nupe know. It is true that most Islamic countries possess orders or sects (*tariqa*) whose rules of worship aim at overcoming this separateness of individual devotions. These are turned into a collective response in which inter-stimulation has full play and which may reach a state of frenzy through the endless repetition in unison of prayer formulæ, through prescribed movements of the body, or with the help of music and dancing. But the self-abandonment of these practices (*zikr*) and their aim of achieving a mystic union of worshipper and deity seem alike alien to the mood of Nupe religious ceremonial. Certainly, neither the religious orders nor their collective acts of devotion have influenced Moslem worship in Nupe.

[1] Significantly, among the many hundreds of Nigerians I encountered in the Sudan and on the Red Sea coast, at varying stages of their pilgrimage, I met only two Nupe men. And in the whole of Nupe country, there were, during my stay, only three returned pilgrims, two of whom were of Fulani extraction.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

Finally, the character of the Moslem priesthood has no counterpart in Nupe. Strictly speaking, Islam has no priesthood; any person of sufficient scholarly standing can hold services or administer the religious rites, though it is common for selected individuals to become the officiants (*Imam*, *Liman* in Nupe) in particular mosques and for the head of the clergy to be appointed or confirmed by the sovereign of the country. Often, too, these appointments stay in the same family, if only incidentally. But normally, there is no trace in Mohammedan priestship of rigidly hereditary tenure, nor of a 'miraculous birth' or similar mystical qualifications. Again, in other Islamic countries the widespread cults of holy men, or holy families, descended from saints or from the kin of the Prophet, have superseded the more prosaic, ordinary priestship. These ideas are once more absent in Nupe, though there is one significant exception. For around the historical and political figure of Mallam Dendo something like saint worship has sprung up. A mosque erected over his grave has become almost a place of pilgrimage, at least for the Fulani aristocracy; and stories of a legendary character about his life and exploits are current throughout the country. The Arabic name for such holy leaders, *sayyid*, is unknown to the Nupe; but they have coined a new word for their one saint—*Mankó*, 'Great Mallam'.

These various divergences have to some extent been resolved by Nupe-izing the orthodox Moslem practices. A minor instance are the open-air mosques found in many smaller or half-pagan villages. They consist of a ring of stones laid out in the open usually under a shady tree. This simple arrangement does not reflect only the simple needs of a small congregation, or its rational desire to economize; even a small congregation could build a mud-hut of the usual type and call it a mosque. Rather, the arrangement seems to indicate also some perseverance in the old manner of worship, which disappears only when Islam is more firmly rooted. The mosques, of whatever kind, introduced a novel social feature also in separating the worshippers from different neighbourhoods; for any fair-sized village will contain several mosques, scattered over the locality, so that each *efu* or ward has its own building. In other words, the coincidence of the actual congregation and the community at large, typical of the pagan ceremonials, no longer holds. It is reintroduced, however, on special occasions. In addition to these local mosques, where the daily prayers are said, any populous Nupe village also possesses a large, central mosque for the service on Friday and on feast days, that is, for the worship of a congregation made coextensive with the community.[1]

[1] This does not apply to Bida town, whose tripartite division is reflected in the three main mosques of the town (see *A Black Byzantium*, pp. 43, 89).

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

794 The daily prayers (*salla*) spoken in Arabic (which few understand) and the weekly service in the mosque (*aduwa*) have become fully part of Nupe life, and if they lack the stimulus of pressing needs or the thrill that goes with rare occasions, this is not felt or ever commented upon. But the Moslem observances have also been remodelled, partly in a revolutionary fashion. As they exist today, they afford expression to the same pressing anxieties which animate the pagan rites, and do so with the same persuasiveness of a direct, articulate appeal to the deity. Over and above the stereotyped prayers, the Nupe have others which ask for special benefits and are meant to take care of such contingencies as a drought or the threat of an epidemic. These prayers may be said both privately, by any family head for his household, and publicly, in the mosque, by the *Liman* on behalf of the whole community. The special prayers are always said after the regular ones and, most important of all, are spoken in Nupe, not in Arabic. In addition, any household or kin group which faces some deep anxiety or threat will arrange a *walima*, that is, a ceremonial meal at which a fowl is killed and a mallam, specially invited, utters a brief prayer; again, an invocation in Nupe follows the Arabic formula, so that this observance differs only in minor details from the communal meal of the pagan ceremonial.[1]

794 782 Let me here quote four Nupe-Mohammedan prayers, concerned with harvest and rain. They have been recorded in two different places, Bida and Lemu, and show the familiar looseness and variability of phrasing, which no orthodox Moslem prayer ever permits; above all, they invoke *Sokó*, not *Allah*, and thus wholly recapture the content and style of the pagan invocations.

Prayer at Harvest time (*Bida*).

Lord God (*Tsoci*), protect the house from the dangers of the harvest season, such as fire, such as falling ill with fever, such as drought. Give us health, *Amin*.

The same (*Lemu*).

The harvest is cleared: *Sokó*, protect us from fire; *Sokó*, protect us from smallpox; *Sokó* protect us from the heat that dries up everything.

Prayer at the Beginning of the Rains (*Bida*).

Sokó, may he give rain in plenty. May he give food that thrives beautifully. The grain, may it thrive beautifully. *Sokó*, send us

[1] The Nupe would in fact say that *walima* is only the 'Mohammedan name' for the ceremonial which the 'pagans' know as *biki*. (See above, p. 110.)

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

water which falls down upon man. And the man who is in a canoe on the water, and the water in the bush, protect them also for all of us.

The same (*Lemu*).

Lord God, protect us from the danger which is in the rain, and the storms, and also the lightning. Protect the house from it. Give us health, *Amin*.

3. CEREMONIALS

We turn to the big religious feasts of Islam which, in their annual recurrence at least, should come closest to, or rival most fully, the fixed pagan ceremonials. Of the seven orthodox Moslem festivals, the Nupe celebrate only three: the Mohammedan New Year, *Muharram*, and the two feasts known in Arabic countries as *Id el Fitr* and *Id el Azha*, the former concluding the month of *Ramadhan*, the latter falling in the 'month of pilgrimage', at the end of the Mohammedan year.[1] The Nupe call the Moslem New Year's feast *navũ* or 'Torches', and name the first month of the year after it; the month of *Ramadhan* is called *etswa azũ*, 'Month of the Fast', and the feast which succeeds it *sallagi* or 'Little Feast' (lit. 'prayer'); the *Id el Azha*, also known in Arabic as *Id el Kibir*, Great Feast, is called *sallakó*, which has the same meaning. The months in which these two feasts fall, the 10th and 12th, respectively, are known by their names.[2] Let us note that in embracing only three of the festivities of Islam the Nupe have retained that 'normal level' of regular ceremonials which we could discern in their traditional religious life.[3]

In all Moslem countries the purely festive aspects of the *Id* tend to outshine the strictly religious ones. These are represented in a religious service held in the open, attended by vast crowds and led by the *Imam*; in the generous giving of alms; and (on the 'Great Feast') in the sacrifice of an 'unblemished animal . . . to commemorate the name of God over the brute beasts which He has

[1] A third, the Birthday of the Prophet, is identified by the Nupe with the *gani* ceremonial, as we have seen, on very little evidence. (See above, p. 217).

[2] These dates correspond to general Moslem practice. But the correspondence is purely nominal since the Nupe calendar operates with the intercalation of a 13th month while the Moslem calendar keeps strictly to the lunar year. In consequence the Nupe feasts always fall roughly in the same season while the orthodox Moslem celebrations correspond in no way to a seasonal calendar.

[3] See pp. 70, 225. This applies only to communities fully Islamized; in a first phase, one of the Mohammedan feasts, the *navũ*, may simply be added to the pagan cycle of rites (see below, p. 244).

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

794
X796

provided' (Qoran, *Surah* XXII). All three features occur in Nupe, the animal being always a fattened ram, killed and eaten in every household that can afford the expense on the third day of the feast. Few Nupe, however, know anything about the meaning of the sacrifice save that it is ordered by the Prophet as a 'sacred occasion'. Much more important is the holiday atmosphere which pervades the three days of the feast. Everybody dresses in his best clothes and visits friends and relations or pays his respects to a noble patron. In Bida, the people throng the streets and gather in the public places to watch the *Etsu* and the 'great ones' of the country ride in resplendent procession from the service to the royal palace. There, outside the palace, a vast crowd is entertained, at the *Etsu's* order and expense, with food for body and eyes; there are equestrian displays, and the performances of professional dancers and musicians, clowns and jugglers.[1]

We note that the two-phase pattern of the pagan ceremonials, in which esoteric and sacred activities always precede the public merry-making, no longer applies: there is nothing esoteric about the religious service, 'merry-making' pervades the whole feast, and one of the 'sacred' activities, the sacrifice of the ram, does not open but concludes the ritual proceedings. Indeed, the *salla* is a spectacle rather than a ritual, at all stages open to all—to men and women, to townsfolk and strangers, and to people of every age. Its main significance lies precisely in this: the *salla* brings together nearly the whole Moslem community, not only symbolically, through being a common observance (or a 'token of identity'), but concretely and physically. At least, it does so potentially. The *salla* is also performed outside Bida, though on a lesser scale, all the larger villages having their own celebrations, when the local District Head, that is, the Emir's representative, plays the part which, in the capital, falls to the sovereign. But the Bida *salla* remains the centre and always attracts visitors from the country, so that at one time or other every Nupe Moslem will attend the celebrations in the capital.

If the *salla* lacks the thrill of secret preparation and esoteric observances, it yet provides others—the thrill of a splendid spectacle and, above all, that of being brought close to the powers that be. Altogether, the emphasis of the *salla* is as much political as religious. It serves as a display of kingship and hence as a buttress of sovereignty no less than as a sacred occasion. In mobilizing the religious community it mobilizes also the population of the Moslem state; so that the religious appeal blends with the confirmation of political allegiance. It is in this fashion, then,

[1] For a fuller description of the 'Great *salla*' in Bida, see *A Black Byzantium*, pp. 143–4.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

that the all-too-broad unity of Islam is (as I put it before) narrowed down to the scope of a national church.

The *navū* is to some extent a smaller replica of the *salla*, including, again, the state procession to the mosque, with all its display of royal splendour and evoking the same festive mood of a large city bent on enjoyment. But the royal display occupies only a brief phase, on the morning of New Year's Day; and the enjoyment has a new emphasis, on youth, and on moral licence.

On the eve of New Year, at nightfall, the young people of Bida, both youths and girls, forgather at the three streams that cross the town. The girls come in little groups, while the boys and young men are formed into companies, each composed of an age-grade association under its leader. They sing and dance on the way, and the youths all carry torches, which they swing or throw high up in the air, and sometimes brandish at one another in playful attacks. Arrived at the river the youths remove their gowns and the girls their upper garments, and thus stripped to the waist wade into the water. They splash about, with much shrieking and laughing, try dance steps, jumps and somersaults, and the boys engage in brief wrestling bouts, invariably terminated by a ducking. Now and again this clowning gives way to a mock battle, when the boys will thrust and throw the torches at one another, age-group fighting age-group, not seriously, but keenly and with marked excitement. It needs skill to catch the wildly flying firebrands or to parry those aimed at you. Nor are narrow escapes uncommon, and first-aid treatments for burns are a regular aftermath of the *navū*. The excitement of the fight, moreover, is matched by the openly erotic excitement provoked by the occasion. This is indeed unique; at no other time will Nupe girls disrobe in the presence of men or show themselves with bare breasts. The girls will keep to the dark side of the river; but the youths throw torches in their direction to surprise a girl while she is undressing or bathing. There is cruder horseplay, too, the boys trying to seize the girls or to bump into them as though unwittingly; while in the shadows and under the bridge couples pursue their amorous play unseen. But though there is plenty of teasing and joking, the language is never obscene. About midnight the bathing breaks up and the young people return to their homes.

This prelude to the *navū* was not always so tame. Until fairly recently the mock battle of torches was meant quite seriously.[1] The three different bathing places are chosen in accordance with the threefold dynastic division of the city, and are visited by the age-grade associations in the respective local division. The diverse

[1] The word 'battle' has been chosen advisedly. All informants describing the usage emphasized that it was 'like a war'.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

loyalties which govern the town hold their sway over youth as well as adults; and on the occasion of the *navū* the factional jealousies, never fully submerged, were allowed to come into the open. Thus the torch processions invariably led to organized and heated fights between the three groups; on the way back from the river, especially, one would ambush the other or try to invade the rival territory. The battle is said to have lasted the whole night, being fought with torches, sticks, stones, and any handy weapons. Injuries (some say, even death) inflicted in the course of the *navū* went unpunished; for on this one night the law of the land was suspended. Eventually, in 1920 or thereabouts, the excesses of this all-too realistic play forced the Government to intervene and to forbid this phase of the *navū*.

In spite of its realism, however, the mock battle not only legitimized factional hostility but also diverted it into relatively harmless channels. For though the boys and youths would give vent to sentiments commonly felt, they themselves were still outside serious politics and not yet genuinely caught up in factional strife. They would still be play-acting, however realistically, much as their whole age-grade life, with its imitation of adult ranks and ambitions, is play-acting and a make-believe copy of 'real life'. For the population of the city, whose sons and brothers took part in the 'battle of youth', this was in the nature of a vicarious and controlled catharsis of tensions grown over the year; for the young fighters, it was the climax of age-grade life and a seal set to this 'education for citizenship'. Needless to say, the practice is still vividly remembered. And it is not only the older people who talk nostalgically about their more exciting youth; the young people today have preserved at least the idea of the thing. Small boys with whom I talked before the *navū* explained to me with great glee all that they and their age mates were going to do to their 'enemies'. In the end, of course, they did nothing; so that today the 'battle of youth' has moved a further stage towards mere make-believe.[1]

The licensed aggression of the torch festival reappears on the next day in a new context, that of kinship. For the *navū* is also an occasion for *ma dzo*, for 'joking', that is, for the licensed liberties commonly referred to as 'joking relationship'. Though much less formalized than in other African societies, the institution of joking relationship plays a clearly defined part in Nupe social life. The individuals standing in this relationship are called *dzomanci*, 'playmates', the relationship itself being derived mainly from kinship position. Thus the joking relationship obtains between grandparents and grandchildren of the opposite sex; between cross

[1] See also *A Black Byzantium*, pp. 396–7.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

cousins; between a man and his elder brothers' wives; between a man and his mother's brother's wives; between a man and his wife's *dzomanci*; and between a woman and her father-in-law and her mother-in-law's sister's sons. The relevance of this arrangement for Nupe kinship organization does not concern us here; nor need we consider the joking relationship as it affects everyday life. Let me only stress that the active partners in this relationship, that is, the individuals entitled to take the liberties, are always young people; older persons cease to engage in the joking relationship or become engaged in it only as passive partners, as the victims exposed to the liberties. In practice, then, the joking relationship is asymmetrical, amounting to liberties taken by children or youths with their elders and, in the majority of cases, by one sex with the other.[1] The liberties themselves take this form. Whenever an 'active' partner in the relationship meets his playmate he would lightly beat him or her with a stick until the victim appeases the assailant with a small gift of money. Or boys and young men would visit the home of a playmate, tie his (her) hands and feet with a grass rope, until once more a small ransom is handed over. Throughout the *navũ* this play goes on. Everywhere you see boys armed with sticks or carrying grass ropes handy; and whole bands of them will swagger along the streets looking for their 'playmates' among the girls and women, shouting at them, brandishing their sticks, and trying to seize them, with unequal success. For the 'passive' partner is allowed to evade the punishment, to retaliate, and even to cheat. Quite a few of the older men when they are caught by their young assailants do not pay the required ransom, but merely press their fingers into their playmates' hands as though handing over a coin, and escape by this ruse. And the women and girls on the market sit behind their wares with a stick or grass rope ready in case a 'playmate' tried his extortions on them. There is no serious note in all this: it is fun, and nothing else, taken in good part by everyone. Throughout this play another *motif* is also visible. The *dzomanci* will often be aided by his friends, and during *navũ* you will everywhere see youths walking in pairs and holding hands, two friends facing together the adventures of the day. Thus the *navũ* becomes a multiple occasion for mobilizing and demonstrating the main social relationships governing Nupe life—age-grade solidarity, political allegiance; kinship bonds; and friendship.

It is difficult to define precisely the Islamic kernel in the Nupe celebrations of the *Muharram*, mainly because the character of

[1] Joking relationship also occurs outside the kindred, between certain Nupe sections and other tribes, or within Nupe communities between occupational groups. As these relationships play no part in the *navũ*, they are here disregarded.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

the feast varies widely in Moslem countries. The bathing in the river is a common feature of the *Muharram*; but it does not concern the young particularly. Now in Nupe, the older people, too, perform the prescribed New Year's ablutions; but they do so at home, in water fetched by the women from the river; the bathing in the river, then, with its erotic suggestiveness, is an instance of Nupe-ization. Again, the play with fire, in the form of bonfires or torches, is fairly common; and in Shiite countries especially, the celebrations also include mock violence and battles. But these have a specific religious emphasis, being a commemoration of the last battle and martyrdom of Husain: of which association no Nupe is aware. Indeed, no Nupe knows or has any theory about the meaning of the 'torches'. Whatever the origin of the feature, the fact that it has come to serve political motives and the organization of adolescence, is plain evidence of its remodelling by Nupe hands.

The *navũ* has spread widely through Nupe Emirate, and today occurs even in villages almost entirely pagan, such as Doko, Sakpe, and Jebba Island, where it is simply added to the cycle of traditional rituals. The public service in the mosque, of course, disappears, as does also the realistic 'battle', that is, the political emphasis peculiar to the situation in the city. Each locality performs the ceremonial independently, and no one thinks of visiting the capital to watch or join in the celebrations there. Yet though there are these numerous independent congregations, the *navũ* is understood to be an identical ceremonial and one which each community shares with the capital and royalty. Its specifically Moslem character is entirely obscured; but no Nupe links the origin of the *navũ* to pre-Mohammedan or pre-Fulani times. Rather it is always thought of as a new ceremonial, bound up with the new regime and as such added to the diverse observances of the country. Thus, though it has become part and parcel of the separate life of villages, it is also identified with the kingdom that embraces them all. So that a rite of Islam is again 'narrowed down' to the concerns of the state and employed in the manner of the older 'royal cults', as a mere 'token of identity'.

4. THE MOSLEM WAY OF LIFE

Our attempt to assess the influence of Islam on the Nupe way of life is rendered difficult by the fact that we do not know precisely in what shape or form the new creed reached Nupe country. Indeed, even in 'typical' Moslem countries the observances of Islam vary extremely widely. And though this difficulty is somewhat less serious in the case of the strictly religious aspects, since these are, at least in their fundamentals, embodied in a written

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

doctrine and uniformly transmitted through the teaching of the Qoran, even this teaching can vary within wide limits; above all, it can be reinforced or belied by the models of practical conduct exhibited by the teachers. Thus we shall presently speak of the confused notions of the Nupe on Moslem cosmology and hagiology, and of their lack of interest in the historical background of Islam. But how far this attitude reflects the Nupe reaction towards the new creed or merely their faithful acceptance of a creed loosely and confusedly taught, it is obviously difficult to say. Quite probably the latter is the true picture; for there is no reason to assume that the first emissaries of Islam were more erudite or theologically-minded than the majority of mallams today. According to some accounts, in fact, the famous Mallam Dendo was little better than a peddler of Mohammedan charms. However this may be, when it comes to the general moral precepts or codes of conduct that go with Islam, we are more uncertain still. Islam reached Nupe through many hands and by many stages, and in a form probably considerably affected by the modes of life of the Sudanese and West African societies where it first took root. Furthermore, many of these are closely akin to Nupe. If then, we find Moslem practices more or less closely attuned to Nupe traditional culture, this may only represent some previous 'remodelling' and, from Nupe point of view, a fortuitous correspondence, not any effort on their part to render the new creed more 'congenial'.

Let me illustrate this by one example, the position of women in Moslem-Nupe society. In orthodox Islam the woman is man's inferior by the will of God, and made to obey him (*Surah* IV). Though women may be as true believers, they are permitted no share in religious activities and rarely given the chance of religious tuition. Legally and socially they are subjected to various disabilities; women (not men) must 'observe continence and not display their ornaments' (that is, must be veiled before strangers—*Surah* XXV, 31); and Mohammedans marrying 'infidel' women must not let 'them go back to the infidels', being responsible for their spiritual welfare (*Surah* LX, 10). None of these tenets applies to Nupe Islam. Women are as free as men and legally as fully qualified; the veiling of the women is unknown; and though the Nupe do not admit women to the mosque or other religious observances, girls of the upper classes are often taught the Qoran. Is this, then, an adjustment of Islam to traditional Nupe notions? Hardly that, for this contrast is true only in comparison with Moslem practices, say in India or the urban society of Arabia and the Eastern Sudan. It disappears when we compare Nupe with the nomadic Moslem tribes in the Sudan or with the Mohammedan Emirates in the north of Nigeria. The Fulani invaders of Nupe,

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

794 562 who started the great wave of Islamization, were probably as liberal or unorthodox in their attitude to women. So that the Nupe would have received their new creed already remodelled by the donors, and the true contrast would be, not between orthodox Islam and the Nupe version, but between the former and African Islam.

794 875 To turn to the other aspects of the Moslem 'way of life', first, to the high value placed on scholarship. Even the most humble follower of Islam is aware of it. Tuition in the creed and *jī katū* (reading, book-knowledge in general) are to him almost one and the same thing; and greater religious perfection coincides with wider learning. The title mallam, 'scholar', freely accorded to the pious, already indicates the trend of thought. One mallam friend of mine expressed it aptly when he spoke of the *ciŋwa katū*, the 'greatness of learning', which makes any Mohammedan scholar equal to the other great ones in the country—rankholders, noblemen, or wealthy landowners. Not that the mallam is necessarily poor or a commoner; many mallams are wealthy, and many members of the titled aristocracy pride themselves on being scholars as well. But the professional scholar does not require the badge or rank nor the backing of wealth to be granted the privileges of high status. His learning makes him the companion of the 'great ones'; his ministration at naming ceremonies, weddings or burials opens him their houses; and even a poor mallam can marry into rich or noble families if his scholarly repute is high; for in this case the bride's father will defray the costs of the brideprice, counting this expenditure as a pious gift of alms.[1]

There are, of course, degrees of learning, and hence distinctions in the status of mallams. In largely pagan villages anyone who has learned to recite a few *surat* of the Qoran and performs his daily prayers is called a mallam; in the Mohammedan capital the name is reserved for those who also teach the Qoran, though the adepts in the art of sand-divining and the sellers of charms are equally included in that class. Mostly a further distinction is drawn between the simple, humble mallam, who knows only the Qoran (or, more often, only small portions of it) and the true scholar, who must have studied *litafi* (books) or *kpikpe* (knowledge) as well. Men of the latter class read eagerly and widely, and acquire books where they can or copy out rare manuscripts. Ignoring, however, the few mallams who practice as judges and have studied the various relevant legal digests and commentaries, the reading of these 'learned men' tends to be indiscriminate and their 'know-

[1] The social position of the mallams and the whole question of Moslem learning and tuition has been fully discussed in *A Black Byzantium*; see especially pp. 102, 378–83.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

ledge' a miscellany of incongruous items. Often the 'books' they get hold of are merely odd assortments of bits of literature, the same volume perhaps containing an extract on marriage law, a page or two on astrology, a treatise on the human body, and a fragment of some Hausa chronicle. Nor does the specific knowledge of Moslem theology fare any better. Again it is a medley of incongruous bits of information and in no way approaches the orthodox teaching of Islam.

The further down you pass in the scale of Nupe Mohammedan scholarship, the more confused and fragmentary becomes this knowledge. Take this summary account of creation and the powers of God which was given to me by one of the 'simple' mallams: 'Mohammed was the first man on earth; the devil (*Sheitan*) sends illness and misfortunes; after death, the good people become kindly spirits (*aljénu*), while evil persons are turned into dust'. Which last statement was the only reference to the ethical sanctions of Islam I encountered in Nupe; for hell or heaven or the last judgment are never mentioned. The notion, incidentally, that Mohammed was the first man is widespread; but otherwise the ideas about creation and the universe are far from uniform. Here is a different and fuller account, recorded from another mallam of this class: Formerly, when all the people lived together in the same place, there existed 'little gods' (*sokó tetengi*), whom God (*Allah*) sent down to earth to take away the souls (*rayi*) of the persons whose life was nearing its end. But the people grew frightened at this mysterious and unannounced demise and tried to evade it by scattering over the earth. So God introduced a new kind of death, heralded by illness, or overcoming man suddenly, through lightning or other natural disasters. These 'little gods' are the *malaika* (the Arabic *mal'ak*, 'angels'). In addition to the messengers of death there exist also *malaika* who bring rain, cause the crops to grow, and watch over man; the chief one amongst them is Jibelelu (Gabriel); others are Mikailu, Ismailu, Ibrahimu, though my informant did not pretend to know them all.

The knowledge possessed by the 'true' mallam is hardly less unorthodox, even though it is fuller and more ambitious. The following text was dictated to me by a gifted pupil of the most famous mallam of Bida and fully conformed to the master's teaching.

'In the beginning there were Adama and Mother Adā. They had three daughters, Mureamu [Miriam, Mary], Fatima [daughter of Mohammed], and Barkisa [Bilkis, the Queen of Sheba], and numerous sons. These were all prophets. God then divided the world into pagans and Moslems. The greatest king of the pagans

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

794 773 was Firauna [Firaun, Arabic for Pharaoh], who conquered the whole earth and had immense wealth. He had seven houses, in each of which a fire was eternally burning; criminals were thrown into these houses, to be burned to death. He also had seven houses filled with wonderful things and a hundred beautiful women in each. Good people were rewarded by being admitted to these houses and being made free of the things they contained. Once there happened to be a great drought and famine; but Firauna prayed to God, and rain fell. Thereupon Firauna said to the people: "Have I not sent rain? I am your God." Thus he claimed that he himself was God, and all who denied him, the Mohammedans among them, were fettered and left lying in the sun until they perished. Firauna decided to make war on God in the sky. He called all his men together and made them build a huge tower. This lasted sixty years. When the tower reached up to the sky, Firauna ordered his soldiers to shoot at the sky with bows and arrows, for two years. But God destroyed the tower and innumerable people perished. Then God called his prophet Musa [Moses] and ordered him to rise against Firauna. Thus Musa called together an army; but it was much weaker than Firauna's, so that the true believers, led by Musa, were turned to flight. Pursued by Firauna they reached a river as wide as the Niger; God caused the water to dry up so that they could cross, but when Firauna's army followed, it was swallowed up by the river. Now Musa ruled over the world and established the reign of God. When he died, he was succeeded by the other prophets, Abraham, Yisa, Haruna, Idirisu, and finally Mohammed.'

794 There is no need to point out the motley nature of this account. Yet the people uncritically accept these crude narratives as evidence of 'learning' as they similarly accept the lists of 'angels' and the string of names with which diviners bolster up their 'astrology'.[1] Since the traditional Nupe beliefs possess little or nothing of this kind, it might be thought that Mohammedan lore fills some pre-existing lacunae. But this is not really so. The average Nupe Moslem is no more interested in the pseudo-Mohammedan cosmology or hagiology than is the pagan Nupe in myths of this kind.[2] But the former remains 'book-knowledge', which goes with the new religion and is expected of its teachers; so that a great many topics

[1] See above, p. 59n.

[2] The experiences of Christian evangelists offer interesting corroboration. The theological cosmology of Christian teaching evokes no interest among the Nupe. An evangelist told me about his abortive attempts in this direction, when his converts-to-be frankly admitted that they 'knew nothing' about the creation of the world but could not be convinced of the value of knowing more.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

with which indigenous sacred knowledge was never concerned are now tacitly assumed to be within the ken of mallams. Whenever you ask the 'man in the street' about the origin of the world, about the sun, moon, and stars, or about the rules of the calendar, he will refer you to the mallams—'these are things the mallams know'. More often than not, this trust is sadly misplaced. But as the Nupe lack of interest in mythology admits of one exception, namely, myths or legends about the genesis of Nupe kingdom, so the growth of the Moslem Emirate has become the theme of numerous stories and quasi-mythical traditions.[1] To be sure, they are not Moslem traditions in the strict sense of the word; but they are traditions about the crucial events of Islam as seen through Nupe eyes. In this sense they add to the religious supports which the Fulani Emirate has come to command, much as the pagan kingdom drew some of its strength from the cycle of myths devoted to Tsoede and his miraculous deeds. And in this sense, too, they may be said to 'fill lacunae', that is, to replace a mythology outdated by events.

Among the other features of the Moslem 'way of life' several fit remarkably (and fortuitously) into the pattern of Nupe culture. This is true, for example, of the attitude to representative art, which is absent in Nupe and discouraged by Islam; of certain general rules of marriage, such as the payment of a 'brideprice', the ease of divorce, and the preference for marriage within the kindred;[2] of the custom of circumcision and one of the dietary rules of Islam, the prohibition of eating pig.[3] The ease with which Moslem kinship rites or the Islamic method of divination found a niche in Nupe life has already been discussed.

There are a few exceptions, however. The Nupe preference for *yawó dengi*, marriage within the kindred, refers only to cross-cousin marriage and excludes the marriage of parallel cousins, which Islamic practice permits and recommends; similarly the sororate, common in Moslem countries, is forbidden by traditional Nupe custom; conversely, the Nupe preferential marriage, between a young man and his mother's brother's widow, is unknown to

[1] Some of these have been quoted in *A Black Byzantium*, pp. 78–9.

[2] The Nupe 'brideprice'—*ewó yawó* ('money of marriage')—corresponds to the 'dower' (*Mahr* or *sadaq*) of Islamic law. The ready acceptance of their equivalence is seen in the linguistic usage, the Arabic word *sadeiki* having become almost a synonym for *ewó yawó*.

[3] Strictly speaking, traditional Nupe culture does not taboo the eating of pigs; but there exists a general idiosyncrasy of this kind, and the Nupe do not keep pigs (unlike their Yoruba neighbours). Another dietary rule of Islam, the prohibition of intoxicants, clashes with the great liking of the Nupe for sorghum beer and with the prominent part this drink plays in all sacrifices. The Nupe Moslem have, in fact, abandoned beer for palmwine, which many consider to be exempt from the Qoranic prohibition.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954

FF52 Nupe FF52

794 582 Islam. In all these cases the result has been an odd compromise. In Bida, the Moslem type of marriage is now more frequent than the traditional type; while among the Mohammedans outside the former is absent and the latter still fully in force. The observance of the levirate is somewhat puzzling. Islam permits the marriage with a brother's widow whether the brother is senior or junior to the deceased; in pagan Nupe, marriage with an elder brother's widow is forbidden, but marriage with a younger brother's widow greatly encouraged. Now, in the villages these rules still obtain; in Bida, however, the first kind of marriage is practised, though not very frequently, while the second never occurs. It seems, then, that in the type of marriage which Islam permits but the indigenous custom disallows, the hold of the latter is still sufficiently strong to prevent any widespread adoption of the novel practice; while the type of marriage both permitted by Islam and strongly pressed by local custom has been abandoned by the more 'orthodox' Moslems. This instance contradicts our previous argument as to the fortuitous fit and hence ready acceptance of certain Moslem customs. Rather, we must admit that such a given fit may, paradoxically, entail the rejection of the custom in question. Has it been rejected so as to prevent any blurring of the division between Moslems and non-Moslems, and thus to emphasize the new, different 'way of life'? It would seem to be so; but since this is the only instance of the kind I can only suggest the possibility. The strong hold of the indigenous practice is finally shown in a type of marriage as definitely forbidden by Islam as it is encouraged by Nupe custom, namely, the nominal marriage of a boy with his paternal grandfather's widow. This *yawó suna* ('marriage in name') is practised both in Mohammedan Bida and in the pagan districts. It is clearly bound up with the idea of reincarnation and with the corresponding practice of naming a grandson after his father's father: identical in name and 'soul', the grandson also assumes the nominal status of his *alter ego*. And as the traditional belief remained unassailed by Moslem doctrine, so the practice rooted in it withstood the impact of the new usages.

794 428 The most serious divergence between indigenous custom and Moslem ideas occurs in inheritance. The Moslem law of inheritance implies, briefly, the division of a man's property among all his offspring (both male and female) as well as his wives, their respective shares varying in amount.[1] Nupe custom, on the other hand,

[1] The inheritance of women's property can be disregarded. Women in Nupe own only personal belongings and money, and can dispose of them more or less as they like—to sons, daughters, or their husband. Though the Nupe practice is more fluid than the Mohammedan usage, the two do not clash; nor has the former changed under Moslem influence.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

makes a younger brother or, in the absence of surviving brothers, the eldest brother's son the main heir, excluding wives and daughters. It must be borne in mind that the main property in rural Nupe is land, worked co-operatively by a 'house', that is, by the male members of the extended family—a man, his younger brothers, and his and their sons.[1] The traditional rules of inheritance thus prevent the fragmentation of land and keep intact the large labour team bound to it; for the land descends together with the headship of the family group, and thus with the command over the 'house' and labour team.[2] The acceptance of the Islamic rules of inheritance would change all this: the land would be progressively fragmented, the labour team broken up, and the headship of large families would disappear. But the Nupe have not turned to the new system in summary fashion; they still exclude wives and daughters from inheritance and largely kept intact the succession to the titular headship of the 'house'. But that most critical innovation, the division of landed property among sons, has steadily been gaining ground. It is important to note, however, that this is not simply a result of the pressure of Islam. I have shown elsewhere how the political and economic changes which began with the Fulani conquest and continue to the present day encouraged individual as against family enterprise and deprived the productive organization of the large family group of its former economic advantages.[3] My point now is that the 'individualistic' type of inheritance exemplified in Islam was also the type the new situation demanded, so that the changed outlook which happened to coincide with the impact of Islam provided additional motives for its acceptance, or for the acceptance of the way of life it represents.

In a wider sense the mere presence of the new religion in such circumstances answered the 'demand of the situation'. The political and economic events which were disrupting family co-operation also assailed the whole authority of family heads and their hold over the younger generation. In consequence the latter, sons or younger brothers of men still pagan, were turning away from the traditional cults (and are doing so even today), not for any particular benefits they were expecting of Islam, but because there was logic in the mere 'turning-away'; for this meant abandoning religious practices which, more or less openly, stood for the *status quo*, for parental authority and an outmoded family structure. The great appeal of the *navũ*, which concedes greater freedom to

[1] See *A Black Byzantium*, chap. III.

[2] This situation is somewhat modified among the craftsmen in the town (see op. cit., chap. XIV). The conclusions drawn further on, however, apply to the labour teams of craftsmen as much as of peasants.

[3] Op. cit., pp. 124, 374–6.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

794 [178] youth, or of the *salla*, which is silent on issues of family authority, is the obverse of this picture.

Here I am repeating facts mentioned previously, though the emphasis is now not on the 'vulnerability' of the older cults in the face of change, but on their dislodgment by the new religion in the country.[1] Islam, as we have seen, proved the stronger mainly because these other changes had prepared the ground; it was a beneficiary of the social upheaval as much as a cause contributing to it. Differently expressed, Islam acted in the manner of a new model, inviting to be followed since it happened to appear at a critical moment, when older norms were breaking down. To be sure, it was a model doubly inviting; it both typified upper-class behaviour and offered alternatives for usages no longer satisfactory, and hence placed a premium on non-conformism. Without it, the dissatisfactions might not have crystallized so easily and the process of change would have been more erratic. As it happened, they found a ready focus or 'model'.

794 186 We turn to the final aspect of the Moslem 'way of life', the attitude of the believer towards other creeds. I have called Nupe religion tolerant. Islam, as we know it from other parts of the world, is the exact opposite. It has all the self-righteousness and intransigence of a fervently proselytizing creed; and it lays claim not only to the exclusive possession of spiritual truth but also to an ultimate ascendancy over all other religions—to the 'inheritance of the earth', promised to the believers and meant to be secured by secular domination and 'victory in the field'.[2] In Africa, where Islam now faces pagan peoples as it did in its early history, this claim to supremacy must stand in a literal sense, meaning the superiority of believers over utter unbelievers, of people who have seen the light over mere barbarians, and of Lords and Masters over some lower species of humanity. In the Sudan, for example, this attitude is well marked. But in Nupe there is, by and large, little trace of it.

Undoubtedly, all Moslems pride themselves on being true believers and many, more or less contemptuously, look down upon the pagans. But as I mentioned before, scholarly mallams will yet frankly admit their interest in the pagan cults; few would consider it incongruous or invidious to discuss, in a purely academic spirit, the beliefs and practices of the 'unbelievers'; and the average Nupe Moslem views them as tolerantly. Nor would a Mohammedan bar all social intimacy with pagans (as I have seen it done in half-Mohammedanized parts of the Sudan) or decline to visit them in their houses or receive their visits in his. Even friendship occurs

[1] See above, pp. 97–114.
[2] See D. S. Margulies, *Mohammed*, 1939, pp. 67–8.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

across the barrier of religion. The following comments by the chief of Pichi illustrate perhaps the extreme of Nupe tolerance, 'There are three benefits', he said, 'Islam, Christianity, and the *kuti*. Some of us have chosen one, others the other. One may be stronger than the rest: but this we do not know.' To be sure, this tolerance cuts both ways; and indeed, this Nupe version of Lessing's Nathan saw nothing strange in 'making *salla*' and attending the *gunnu* as well. But then, he was only a self-professed Moslem, whom others considered a pagan at heart.

Yet, though his attitude may not be typical of the Nupe Moslems, it is typical of the outlook of the people among whom Islam finds its converts. The final step of conversion changes it but little; indeed, it can hardly be otherwise since conversion is so loose an affair and not a real 'step' at all. But in so far as the outlook of the confirmed Moslem is changed, carrying with it that pride and awareness of superiority, the pride and superiority are social rather than specifically religious. What counts is, first and foremost, the assimilation to upper-class culture, and only secondarily the deliverance from unbelief.

5. CONTACT AND INTEGRATION

In this chapter we were dealing with instances of a much-discussed social process, 'culture contact' or 'acculturation'. The wider theoretical issues involved are beyond our present scope; but no discussion of this kind can avoid touching upon one such general problem, namely, the relationship between the cultures brought into 'contact' and the 'resultant' culture emerging from it. Now, this is a question of end-states, of the final outcome of these processes of change and contact; and logically, we should start with their analysis.

The physical model of 'contact', of a 'clash of cultures', or of their 'impact' upon one another, is more misleading than helpful when picturing these processes. We revert, therefore, to our paradigm, a group possessed of given modes of behaviour, habit patterns if you like, which comes to face new models of behaviour of such-and-such pull or attractiveness. That the reactions are likely to be complex and intricate no one will deny; more importantly, they are progressive, that is, take the form of chain reactions. It is clearly not so that the new models are simply accepted, rejected, or exchanged for the habitual ways of acting as it were once and for all, after which no further readjustment will occur. The religious conversion of a people certainly is not a simple all-or-none affair, but a process of many stages in which an initial acceptance may spread further, be deepened or changed in

3: Forde E-4 (no date) 1955 FF52 Nupe FF52

CULTS[1]

Certain cults and rituals are peculiar to particular Nupe sub-tribes.

The Ebe have a *šikinta* masked hunting ritual, which is associated with the ancestral spirits and may be performed to remedy sickness or barrenness; the Gbedye have the masked rituals known as *elo* and *mamma*, while the Benu, although professing Islam, perform a *gani* masked ceremony in which many characteristic features of the *gunnu* cult have been incorporated. The Kusopa offer sacrifices to a mythical ancestor of *kola-nut* planting; the Dibo also have an ancestor cult, the rites for which are performed in the now deserted town of Forgwe in Abuja Emirate, where the ancestral graves are. Another form of ancestor cult, *gugu*, derived from the Yoruba *egungun*, is performed at funerals by the Konú of Kutigi town, who were originally Yoruba slaves.

The Kyedye, although now strongly Moslem, and other riverain groups such as the Bataci and the Kakanda, have cults concerned with water and fishing. These include *nddduma*, in which annual sacrifices are made to the spirits of the river to ensure and limit the annual flood, and *ketsú* in which sacrifices to the spirit of a large rock in mid-stream near Jebba are made to cure illness and bring good fortune in fishing. The chains of Tsoede, which may be used as instruments of ordeal, are also the centre of numerous sacrificial rites. In the Kyedye villages of Giragi and Fofo sacrifices are offered to protect the village from sickness and to bring fertility and prosperity. Usually performed in December at the time of the Niger's second flood, and in February before the start of the fishing season, they are repeated later as a kind of "harvest thanksgiving," when palm-oil and beer are poured over the chain. Each village has a priest whose duty it is to safeguard the chain and make sacrifices to it.

The gunnu cult[2]

The *gunnu* cult, the most vital religious cult in Nupe, is concerned with fertility, crops, health, and general prosperity. It is performed both on fixed dates and in times of misfortune such as drought, epidemics, failure of crops, etc. It is common to all sections of Nupe, though according to legend it originated among the Beni, but is not necessarily enacted on the same date by all. The date chosen is generally one of three: the fifth month, the beginning of the harvest of early bulrush millet; the ninth month, the beginning of the guinea-corn harvest; or the 13th month, the end of the dry season. Rites are generally performed towards the end of the month, when the moon rises late. There is a *gunnu* priest in each community who is called *ndazó* or *gunnukó*. There are drummers everywhere, but the ritual dress, sacrificial food, and the duration of taboos vary from section to section. The performance is in three parts: the first performed at night by boys and men; the second next morning when there is a sacrifice and communal meal and short dance by the men —this part is secret; the third part consists of a general dance by men and women performed later on the same day.

MEDICINES[3]

Medicine (*cigbe*) is regarded as an important means of contending with the power of evil, though it may serve both good and evil ends. Rituals or cults are regarded as, in a sense, a delegation of God's power in compensation for his remoteness, and are in the hands of sub-tribes or villages. Medicines, on the other hand, are, except in aberrant form, in the hands of individual practitioners and put to use for individuals.

Nupe medicines are concoctions of roots and other ingredients which may have to be found under particular circumstances or treated in a particular way, used

[1] Nadel, 1942, pp. 23–8; 1940a; Temple, 1919, pp. 113, 331–5; Notes on Kede District, 1950.

[2] Nadel, 1954a, pp. 77–84; see also Nadel, 1937a, for details of the ritual and a study of its significance.

[3] Nadel, 1954a, pp. 17–21, 132–62 and *passim*.

[Information on the Mallam schools where Koranic learning is taught has been placed in category 874. -- Analyst]